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PERSONALITY AND INDIVIDUALITY

BY FRANCIS ROGERS

THERE are in English two words that the dictionaries treat as almost, if not quite, synonymous in meaning, which to my mind symbolize two fundamentally different ideas. One of these words is *personality*; the other *individuality*. The first is derived from the Latin *persona*, mask, and signifies the mask worn by every soul on its journey through the world, through human life. It is the medium through which we are known to other human beings and communicate with them. We may say that it is a kind of shell, the external and superficial part of us. Individuality, the derivation of which from the Latin is equally clear, is our individual and indivisible part. Chesterton in his study of the life of the painter, Watts, calls Faith the irreducible minimum of Hope. So individuality may be described as the irreducible minimum of man, his immortal soul.

Individuality is, then, the real I; personality only the seeming. Personality is the incarnation of individuality. "We descend to meet." It is our personalities that greet one another when we meet, "drain the cup before the tavern fire," do business, discuss politics and the cost of living, and speculate learnedly as to the true nature of immortality. Individuality, on the contrary, is the inmost kernel of our being, is essentially isolated, and seldom, if ever, meets another individuality face to face. It is the friend that Emerson described but never knew. But it is the I that God registers in his eternal books. It is the deathless seed that under the fostering care of a wise and loving Father grows finally into the tree of a full and fruitful life.

Life is continuous and immortal, punctuated only by the phenomenon known as death. "In my Father's house are many mansions." The interruption of death is only the connecting door between one house of life and its neighbor. Human experience is a great university established for the education of our

individualities. On its books we are entered and recorded as individualities, though from matriculation to graduation we are known to our fellow students as personalities, except when, in our highest moments, we reveal our true identity to other discerning and sympathetic individualities.

Personality is individuality playing its part in the human comedy; it is "the player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and is no more." It is the make-up, costume, lines and action of the rôle for which individuality is cast. After the final curtain costume and stage setting are laid away and the impersonation becomes a thing of reminiscence only. The memory of most impersonations fades and then disappears utterly, although that of some few—wonderfully few in proportion to the total number—by reason of their words and deeds finds a more or less enduring place in the pages of written history. With the impersonation, individuality disappears from human ken, to play other parts on other stages, and to acquire little by little a technic that shall enable it finally to impersonate perfectly the rôle of a fully developed human soul.

The Why, the Whence, and the Whither of individuality are unknown and unknowable. We glimpse a little of the How; beyond that all is silence. Once in an age a mighty individuality, rich in experience and wise from the formative schooling of countless personalities, comes upon the world's stage as protagonist, shows us how a great tragic part should be played, then passes into the wings and is seen no more. To our loss and sorrow, we seldom recognize the greatness of the actor till the curtain has fallen and the lights are extinguished. The opportunity has slipped by and we are left to scrutinize the individuality that has gone on, as through a glass darkly, by means only of our memory of the personality. How quickly these memories become faraway and vague! Lincoln has been dead scarcely fifty years and he is already become to us a person of tradition. Many men still living clasped his hand, looked into his eyes, heard his voice; but how little they can tell us of the loveliness and power of the individuality that manifested itself through the medium of that uncouth personality!

Individuality, the mysterious and silent, leaves behind it few

traces describable in words, for individuality speaks to individuality only, and then by that wireless telegraphy whose code is known to highly spiritualized souls alone. Individuality has its lesson to learn, its part to play; the lesson is well learned, the part is well played—thoroughly learned and thoroughly played—for God never works in vain or fails to achieve his ends. But how little we can say about it all! The Recording Angel is the only biographer of individuality. The noblest life ever lived stands alone in having bequeathed to us the essence of its individuality, an inheritance that is the guiding star and inspiration to millions of human souls. Of the personality that clothed it we have scarcely a conception.

Personality is, of course, obvious enough. It enunciates new doctrines, accumulates vast material wealth, it sways multitudes by its eloquence and seems really to control the history of the nations. We are quick to recognize its potency. But, when all is said and done, how little of personality survives the living presence! Scarcely a score of the great figures in history have left more than a nebulous, shadowy memory of their personalities. Julius Caesar, St. Paul, St. Francis, Mahomet, Luther, Cromwell, Voltaire, Napoleon, Washington and Lincoln, whose names are household words, and about whom innumerable volumes have been written, are to us merely “cloudy symbols” of great historical movements. Hamlet, Othello and Macbeth, figments only of a poet’s brain, are more real to us than the mightiest historical personalities, for in them we approach more nearly to the enduring part, the individuality of man. From the poet who can create

Forms more real than living man,
Nurslings of Immortality,

we derive our truest glimpses of individuality; and it is through the glass of imagination that we descry most clearly the eternal verities of our nature.

And yet, although individuality is the real and enduring part of us—what we are “worth to God”—we must not depreciate the value of personality. Personality is the only means by which individuality can perform its work and learn its lesson in this mundane life. In personality we lead our lives and communicate

and work with our fellow creatures. It is, in a sense, both play and player, scholar and teacher, the tool and the hand that wields it; without it, individuality would have no capacity for self-expression or self-development.

Let us not always say,
 'Spite of this flesh to-day,
 I strove, made head, gained ground upon the whole!
 As the bird wings and sings,
 Let us cry, "All good things
 Are ours, nor soul helps flesh more now than flesh helps soul."

All human life is but a discipline, a going to school. This life of ours, which we are leading to-day with as much intensity and interest as if it had had no birth before elsewhere, and were to have no setting here, is (to use again a previous metaphor) but one brief course in an infinitely diverse curriculum, a soul-expanding experience

Ere I be gone
 Once more on my adventure brave and new.

Whence come we? Whither go we? What is it all about, anyway? To these questions we can receive answers only in terms of pure imagination. The secret of life is unknowable. But even the records of the material world tell us "in whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind." Of God's ultimate purposes we can assert only that they are pure, but He vouchsafes us here and again hints of His methods—"echoes from beyond the grove."

Often as the inward ear
 Catches such rebounds, beware!—
 Listen, ponder, hold them dear;
 For of God,—of God they are.

From these echoes and glimpses of the eternal purpose, which in our highest imaginative moments meet our inner senses, we can realize, each of us for himself, something of the true relation existing between individuality and personality and construct a philosophy of life of substantial value.

FRANCIS ROGERS.